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Pollard spy case's larger issue: Why spy on friends?

Israelis seen as second only to Soviets in seeking data in US

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The Jonathan Pollard espionage case has sparked a broad federal investigation into alleged Israeli spy activities in the United States.

And it has raised questions about why friendly countries spy on each other.

"Of course it goes on," says former Central Intelligence Agency director Stansfield Turner, referring to such activities. "But there is a big difference. When you spy on an enemy you risk having your agents captured and jailed, or killed. When you spy on a friend, you risk considerable embarrassment and impact on your foreign policy."

In the wake of Pollard's guilty plea on Wednesday to charges that he supplied Israeli officials with stacks of sensitive US military secrets, Israel is working to minimize any damage from the case on US-Israeli relations.

The Israeli government has said little about the Pollard case, but officials have repeatedly stressed that the former Navy intelligence analyst's spying was an unauthorized espionage operation carried out without the knowledge and support of the Israeli government.

Some Reagan administration officials have their doubts. Details of the Pollard case contained in court documents show that the Pollard spy ring was well organized, well financed, and involved an Israeli Air Force colonel, an Israeli intelligence officer, the science consul at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, and an employee at the embassy. All four were named in court documents as unindicted co-conspirators.

In addition, the documents indicate that other Israeli officials and diplomats may have been present at meetings when Pollard delivered stolen US classified documents. US Attorney Joseph E. diGenova says the investigation is continuing and that individuals cited in the court papers are the subject of probes.

As a reward for his espionage, Pollard was told that he had been granted Israeli citizenship and that after 10 years of spying in the United States he would move to Israel and live under a new identity as "Danny Cohen," the documents say. In addition, a foreign bank account was set up with the understanding that \$30,000 would be deposited in the account each year during Pollard's anticipated 10 years as an Israeli spy.

Such preparations and promises suggest to some US officials a broader Israeli government involvement in the case. Others maintain that these new details fail to disprove Israeli government assertions that the operation was organized by a cadre of officials within Israel's intelligence bureaucracy who were operating without broader government authority.

Admiral Turner and William Colby, also a former CIA director, declined to discuss the extent of Israeli espionage activities in the US.

A classified 1979 CIA report on Israeli intelligence activities said that information on secret US policy and collection of scientific intelligence in the US were top priorities for the Israelis. The former chief of the Justice Department's internal-security section has been quoted as saying that Israeli intelligence was the second most active foreign intelligence service in the US. The most active spy network is run by the Soviet Union.

"We always assume that they [the Israelis] have a high degree of activity," says a former US intelligence official. But he noted that clandestine efforts by Israeli agents and the risks of being exposed would normally be balanced against the large amount of information Israeli officials could gain through legitimate channels and contacts. US and Israeli intelligence services cooperate closely on matters of mutual concern.

"Any intelligence operation has to answer three questions: How important is the information? What are the risks of being exposed? What is the result if exposed?" Mr. Colby says.

He notes that the US has had agents in "various countries around the world," but that certain close allies have been considered off bounds for clandestine operations. "We would be out of our minds if we spied on Canada. The negative results on such a close ally would be ridiculous," Colby says.

Likewise, some observers say it is hard to believe that the Israeli government would jeopardize its solid relations with the US and \$3 billion in US aid simply to maintain an illicit back channel for classified US documents. "When you weigh the benefits of spying against friend or foe, the closer the friend the less likely there are to be benefits," Turner says. "I can't see where the Israelis have much of anything to benefit from a man like Pollard."

He noted that the Pollard case underscores the need in democratic countries for a system of checks and balances, similar to those in the US, to ensure that intelligence officials are held accountable for their actions and their mistakes.